

Remarks of Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
Baguio Independence Day Celebration
As prepared for delivery

Members of Congress, Governors, Mayors, military leaders, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Na-im-bag nga rabi-i yo amin apo (In Ilocano – good evening).

I'm delighted to welcome you this evening to our celebration of U.S. Independence Day and Philippine-American Friendship Day. I'm happy that so many friends from Baguio and the Cordilleras region were able to visit me here at our lovely summer "cottage," which has witnessed so much history in its seventy years of existence. Every year in July, we commemorate the deep and lasting friendship between our two nations, and I am delighted that my first visit to Baguio is for this occasion.

I'd like to state right away that I am delighted to serve in the Philippines as the U.S. Ambassador. I have made many friends in my short time here, and I find that Americans and Filipinos have many things in common.

This residence is just one of many sites that remind us of the 101-year old history of the United States and Baguio; another is Teachers' Camp, where the teachers known as Thomasites – no relation – trained generations of Filipino teachers and laid the foundation of the educational system here in the Philippines.

Over the years, Baguio and the Cordilleras region have been gracious hosts to those latter-day Thomasites: the many Peace Corps volunteers who help their Philippine counterparts in education, youth development, and environmental protection. Several of them are here with us this evening and I know they'd love to talk to you about the good work they are doing. If the Philippine Government approves, we hope to nearly double the number of Peace Corps

volunteers in the Philippines this year; it's a partnership we are very proud of and I appreciate the support of your communities for our Volunteers.

We also have other educational and cultural partnerships. If you haven't done so already, please visit the American Corner hosted by our friends at the St. Louis University. You will find books, videos, and other reading materials about the United States. There is also information for those of you interested in studying in the U.S. Sometimes we hold interactive video conferences there to connect Baguio to American specialists in Manila or even in the United States on various topics of interest. We also have information at the Philippine Military Academy Library and the Baguio City Public Library.

Na-pintas nga ili iti Baguio (Baguio is a wonderful city). And you are very hospitable. Today, I had the honor to visit the Philippine Military Academy and tour two American businesses that have created thousands of jobs for Filipino workers. I also paid a courtesy call on your distinguished mayor.

The Philippines recently celebrated the inauguration of a new president, a new vice president, and a new vision for the future. We were all inspired by the energy, the enthusiasm, and the hope that surrounded the inauguration. Great things are possible, but hard work lies ahead. The United States, and all of us in the American Embassy, stand ready as friends, to help you make that vision a reality, and make the Philippines a better place for all citizens.

Again, thank you for joining me this evening. Please relax and enjoy the food. *Ag-byag ti Pilipinas ken America!*